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WHY DO THE GOOD SUFFER?

A MEDITATION SUGGESTED BY THE BOOK OF JOB

BY

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These pages are dedicated to the memory of a lovely little girl, sixteen years of age when she went hence, stricken with a terrible and mysterious disease, the only case, save one, in the medical annals of the state of Massachusetts.

"For the thing which I fear cometh upon me,
And that which I am afraid of cometh unto me.
I am not at ease, neither am I quiet, neither have
I rest;
But trouble cometh." *Job 3:25-26.*

"For he breaketh me with a tempest,
And multiplieth my wounds without cause.
He will not suffer me to take my breath,
But filleth me with bitterness." *Job 9:17, 18.*

WHY DO THE GOOD SUFFER?

WHY DO THE GOOD SUFFER?

I

The maladjustment between character and circumstance did not escape the early religious teachers of Israel. Repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, but especially in the book of Psalms, the question is raised, "Why do the good suffer?" and mighty efforts are put forth to answer it.[1]

However, the book of Job is the most elaborate attempt in the Scriptures to find the final answer to this question.

The book consists of forty-two chapters. Very few people take the trouble to read them through. Let us frankly admit that they are tedious for the most part. There is endless repetition, and inconclusive argument, but out of the mass of words and strange twists of oriental reasoning

[1] Prov. 23:17-18; Ps. 37:1-2; Ps. 73:3-5; Ps. 73:17-18.

the earnest student may rescue many priceless gems of satisfying truth.

Why do the good suffer?

(1) They suffer, replies the unknown author of this sacred drama, in order that their honesty, sincerity, disinterestedness may be established beyond question.

In the prologue Satan is represented as coming into the presence of Jehovah "from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." [2]

And Jehovah inquires of Satan if he has taken notice of the integrity of his servant Job, "one that feareth God, and turneth away from evil."

Satan replies that he has; but then, with a sneer, asks a question overflowing with vile insinuation:

"Doth Job fear God for nought?" [3]

The unmistakable inference is that he serves God because it pays. With the Almighty as a silent partner, Job has succeeded in accumulating a vast fortune, in establishing a great family, in

[2] Job 1:7.
[3] Job 1:9.

entrenching himself in power. Who would not serve Jehovah to get all this? But let the Lord strip Job of all he has, let him leave his obsequious servant a broken and despised creature, and then it will become evident why Job renders lip praise to his God in the days of his prosperity.

God knows that Satan is merely expressing his satanic personality in these dark insinuations. But the heavenly court, and mortal man, and the black creatures who dwell in darkness, lacking omniscience, do not know how deep the roots of righteousness have penetrated the being of Job. Job himself is not aware of the strength of his will and purpose, nor does he suspect how inexhaustible and how tender are the consolations of God. Therefore Jehovah permits Satan to work his will on the Hebrew patriarch. And when this man, who has always feared God and turned away from evil, disfigured and tormented by disease, is abandoned on an ash heap outside the city wall, Jehovah's confidence in him is vindicated. Far from heeding his wife's advice,

"Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? curse God and die," [4]

[4] Job 2:9.

we hear him, amidst his sobs, restating the fundamentals of his faith:

"What, shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?" [5]

"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" [6]

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him!" [7]

Yes, there is such a thing as disinterested goodness; there are folks,—not many, but still a considerable number,—who will serve God even if it does not pay!

(2) Why do the good suffer?

In order that the sediment of sin in their souls may be consumed as with fire, answers the book of Job.[8]

It is one thing to be good, it is another to be perfect. Even in good men there is a deposit of evil,—a little pride, or arrogance, or vanity, or

[5] Job 2:10.
[6] Job 1:21.
[7] Job 13:15.
[8] Job 5:17-18; 10:4-7; 11:13-14; 13:23; 22:4; 23:10; 23:1-28; 33:23-28; 34:15-16.

selfishness; a little jealousy, or avarice, or cruelty, or passionate desire. Therefore we hear the Psalmist pray:

"Who can discern his errors?
Cleanse thou me from secret faults.
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
Let them not have dominion over me:
Then shall I be upright,
And I shall be clear from great trangression." [9]

Good men are keenly conscious of their shortcomings. They are aware of the glorious goodness of God, hence their defects of character take on hideous proportions by comparison with the divine effulgence. Listen to Isaiah as he humbles himself in the presence of the Lord seated upon a throne, high and lifted up:

"Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts." [10]

Listen to Paul,

[9] Ps. 19:12-13.
[10] Isa. 6:5.

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" [11]

And this sediment of sin deflects the arrow of the good man's purpose from the ideal goal even as the iron in a ship deflects the needle in the compass, compelling the mariner to make corrections in his calculations.

Now, in order that the good man may pass from goodness to perfection, God leads him through the hot fires of adversity, that the purifying flame may destroy the last remnant of sin, leaving behind the pure gold of character to shine on for ever.

(3) Why do the good suffer?

In order that the moral law may be exalted and firmly established in the reckoning of man, is the third answer of the book of Job.[12]

If one grants that there is a sediment of sin in the good, it follows that even good men attempt to violate the laws of God. This is a pretty good definition of sin, the attempt to violate the moral law. We carelessly say that sin is the violation of the moral law. But no one has ever

[11] Rom. 7:24.
[12] Job 4:8-10; 6:4; 9:1-4; 22:21-30.

successfully violated any of God's laws, whether natural or spiritual. The Titanic attempted to steam through a field of ice, and straightway went to the bottom with its priceless cargo. The sinner attempts to ignore the Divine Will, and straightway comes to grief.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." [13]

And God can not ignore the sin of the good man, any more than He can ignore the sin of the sinner, without stultifying Himself. Natural and spiritual law is sacred because it is the expression of the Creator's character. Therefore the good man, even as the bad man, damages himself in proportion to the impetus with which he collides with the Divine Nature. A good father punishes his boy when disobedient, not because he considers him depraved (the father would be the first one to resent the imputation) but that the child may from the very beginning realize that the moral law is inexorable and supreme.

Here and there in the book of Job there are

[13] Gal. 6:7.

hints to the effect that when the good man sins he should be punished even more severely than the wicked; for having made professions of allegiance to the Divine Will, through his fault the moral law is brought into contempt.

"He is chastened also with pain upon his bed,
And with continual strife in his bones;
So that his life abhorreth bread,
And his soul dainty food." [14]

These then are the three reasons advanced by the author of the book of Job in explanation of the suffering of the good. They suffer in order that their honesty, sincerity, disinterestedness may be established beyond question; they suffer that they may pass from goodness to perfection; they suffer in order that the inviolability and sacredness of the divine law, which is the expression of the Divine Nature, may be made manifest.

[14] Job 33:20.

II

And yet the argument is incomplete. When the last word of the book of Job is reached the aching void in the inquirer's heart is not filled. We must look elsewhere for a truer answer, we must search deeper.

Why do the good suffer?

Because man is finite in knowledge, hence he learns through experience. We are moving out of darkness into light, paying as we go. And the price has been, and is, frightful!

If the reader of these pages should turn to Sir Hugh Clifford's fascinating book, "The Further Side of Silence," [1] he would gain a tolerably fair idea of the progress achieved by the race to which he belongs. Who can estimate the distance separating us from the naked brown men of the Malay Peninsula, dwelling in the forest, swinging from branch to branch like their first cousins, the

[1] "The Further Side of Silence," by Sir Hugh Clifford, Doubleday, Page & Co., 1917.

apes, sleeping in the ashes of their camp fires, the pitiful victims of superstitious fears awakened by the moaning of the wind and the howling of the man-eating tiger!

There was a time, hundreds of thousands of years in the dim past, when the human beings from whom we have sprung resembled these tree dwellers. And the reason we are not swinging like them from branch to branch, but are living a complex civilized life in which the school, the hospital, the library, the printing press, steam and electricity, not to mention the church, loom so large, is that countless generations preceding us have explored the mysterious and thorny path of life, leaving behind for our guidance priceless experiences recorded in crimson characters.

At inestimable cost man has become acquainted with the laws which safeguard life when obeyed, and destroy it when discarded. There was a time when man in the presence of disease was as helpless as a three-hour babe confronted by a raging bull. He knew nothing of bacteria, infection, contagion. He saw his child well to-day and dead to-morrow. No wonder that he succumbed to the fear of evil spirits populating the forest,

or even animating beasts, reptiles and stones! If only he had possessed the modern piercing eye, which we call the microscope, he would have discovered the existence of an invisible microcosm full of devils to which we give the names of germs, bacteria, and microbes!

No longer in a civilized community do we fear cholera, bubonic plague, diphtheria, typhoid and yellow fever. Even tuberculosis can be conquered, if taken in time. Thus one of the great causes of human suffering, disease and premature death, is being eliminated. The discovery of ether as an anæsthetic, of bacteria, of antisepsis and asepsis, of X-ray, have made modern surgery possible. And modern surgery is robbing the grave of many of its intended victims.

We learn through experience. Being finite in everything, we can not know the end from the beginning. We must take one step at a time. And frequently we step in the wrong direction.

Some good men are very foolish. In moments of carelessness they do things which end in disaster.

Here is a devoted father, very much absorbed in the problems of his profession. His mind is

far away as he slams the door of his automobile, and incidentally cuts off two fingers from his little daughter's hand. A year passes. Once more in an absent-minded spell this affectionate father slams the door of his automobile. This time three fingers come off the baby's hand. Will any one venture to suggest that somehow the Father in heaven should have forestalled the action of the good but careless parent on earth?

Here is a very good man driving his automobile. He becomes aware that his gasolene is almost spent. He stops at the nearest garage to secure a fresh supply. It is night, therefore he can not see how nearly full his tank is. Instead of feeling with his fingers, he strikes a match, holds it over the mouth of the tank, and peers in. There is a violent explosion. Both the automobile and the holder of the match are blown across the road; and, worse yet, the innocent garage proprietor is enveloped in a sheet of flame.

What else could happen? When a match is held over the fumes of gasolene it must explode, or it ceases to be gasolene. The character and record of the holder of the match can not be taken into consideration. Should the Creator

make exceptions in favor of good men who for the moment, in Dante's words, have lost.

". . . il ben dell'intelletto"

the boon of reason, His universe would collapse in confusion.

These are some of the foolish things which good men do in moments of mental aberration, to their sorrow and regret.

But then good men are led into error under the most perplexing and baffling circumstances. If only they could see the end from the beginning, how differently would they plan and act!

They have taken counsel of their wisest friends before embarking on a momentous undertaking, they have lifted their plans upon the wings of prayer to the Throne of Grace, only to find when irrevocably committed to the enterprise that they are moving in a blind alley, yes, that they are confronted by a stone wall. And then in humiliation these good people have no choice but to retrace their steps, and start afresh oppressed by the consciousness of failure.

And it is seldom that one may use to advantage the experience acquired at frightful cost, simply

because the identical combination of circumstances never returns. At this point we are face to face with one of the chief arguments for immortality. Surely sometime, somewhere, the good Heavenly Father will give us an opportunity to invest in a glorious enterprise, which shall know no failure, the experience for which we have paid with bloody sweat and with groanings that can not be uttered!

III

But we must search deeper for the most satisfying answer to the question, Why do the good suffer?

Not in the book of Job, but in the writings of the Great Unknown prophet of the Babylonian exile; or, better still, in the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth, is found the clearest answer to this momentous question. Since the book of Job was written searchers after God have discovered that life is vicarious.

Vicarious means to change places, to act or suffer for another, to endure the consequences of an action or situation for which the victim is not responsible.

And life is vicarious, both negatively and positively.

Negatively, since multitudes are the unwilling and protesting victims of the sins and blunders of others. With them it is not a matter of choice,—they simply can not help themselves, for they

stand directly across the path of the wicked or of fools as they sweep on to destruction. Illustrations abound.

Here is a little child suffering from a frightful nervous disorder: here is another threatened with blindness: here is a boy, dull and stupid, who looks out upon the world with the vacant stare of the cow in the fields. Why all this misery? Surely these little ones have not sinned so grievously as to deserve such punishment!

The answer is not far to seek. They are suffering vicariously. Their fathers, or grandfathers, or great-grandfathers before them have been great sinners, setting at nought the commandments of God. The terrible law of heredity which, like an angel with flaming sword, stands watch over the human race, stamping out whatever makes for degeneracy and death, and encouraging whatever makes for strength and life, —is clearly set forth in one of the ten words of Moses:

"Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto

thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments." [1]

Here is a middle-aged woman in a humble home. She must rise before the break of day to attend to her children's needs. After doing a fair day's work, she must go out to earn her living sweeping, washing, scrubbing. But two frail hands can not earn enough to pay for the food, clothing, and shelter of a large family. Hence the oldest daughter must come out of the high school and go into the mill. Even then the combined efforts of mother and daughter are barely sufficient to secure the necessities, not to mention the luxuries which are part of the comfort and satisfaction of a cosy home.

Why so much misery? Because the head of the family is dissipated. He has cultivated the taste for strong drink until now he is no longer the master of his soul. Much of the time he lies in a drunken stupor, and it is an open question whether he is not less trouble when intoxicated than when sober, clamoring for more drink. Thus the innocent suffer vicariously.

[1] Exodus 20:5-6.

This negative aspect of the vicariousness of life is summed up in the words of Paul when he writes to the Romans:

"For none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself." [2]

Which means that our spirit and conduct affect for weal or for woe other lives. And this realization that our destinies are inextricably intertwined, so that we stand or fall together, should hold us with an iron grip in the path of duty and of honor, lest by reason of our sin or folly we should add to the mass of human wreckage strewn along the shores of time.

The world war has multiplied by the million the ranks of the vicarious but protesting sufferers of the world. Did the people of Belgium or Northern France, who were swept by the field-gray legions pouring out of Germany, even as falling leaves are blown by autumnal winds,—did they have anything to say as to whether there should or should not be a great war within their borders? And so with all the wretched nations in Europe or in Asia whose lands have trembled

[2] Rom. 14:7.

to the tramp of marching millions, to the thunder of artillery, to the crash of engines of war! Oh, the innocent victims of the last six years! Who can number them as their bones lie rotting in the shallow graves of half a thousand battlefields, or strewn across the sands of the Syrian desert, or forgotten at the bottom of the restless sea!

So much for vicariousness in its negative aspects.

How glorious life may become is not apparent until we consider vicariousness on its positive side.

We have seen that some people suffer under protest: they are overtaken by the wicked or fools as they move on to destruction, even as the fisherman on the rocks sometimes is overtaken by the swiftly rising tide.

But then on the other hand, there is that vast multitude, which no man can number, who have offered themselves a living sacrifice in the hope that, through their labor of love, the innocent may be shielded, and the lost may be found and saved.

Let the reader picture a mother and her daughter, both utterly broken in health, and one of them prematurely brought to the brink of the

grave. What has reduced them to this pitiable condition? Anxiety for an only son and brother whom they have loved with a consuming love. When he was a babe his little sister voluntarily would sit by his crib hour after hour quietly rocking her doll, uttering not a sound, lest she should disturb the slumber of her angel brother. And as the years pass this sister's affection, far from cooling, grows greater, and deeper, and more sacrificial.

At last the time comes for this baby boy grown to be a youth, to enter college. There he forms the wrong kind of friendships, gradually he acquires the taste for strong drink, until liquor becomes his relentless master, driving him to perdition. Morning after morning he staggers home shamefully drunk, only to find his mother sitting in an arm chair by the window. And when the fumes and fury of the demon of drink have given way to reason and penitence, the remorseful son pleads with his mother not to wear herself out on his account,—never again to sit up waiting for him to come home. And the broken-hearted mother replies with never-failing patience: "My son, some one must go to the wall on your ac-

count,—why not I? If by sitting up until daybreak I can bring you home fifteen minutes sooner than you would return otherwise, I shall sit up all night every night that you are out of the house!" Which reminds us of the prophet's cry:

> "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?
> How shall I cast thee off, Israel?" [3]

And then from time to time there arises some great man who deliberately plunges into a sea of trouble, utterly careless of consequences to himself if through his burning words and ceaseless effort he may defend a righteous cause, a priceless principle, a sovereign ideal.

Thus all the prophets of Israel suffered vicariously. Did Isaiah deserve to be sawn asunder like a log? Did Jeremiah deserve to be cast into a filthy dungeon, and later did he deserve to be dragged into Egypt, there to perish miserably? It is only necessary to state the question to know how it should be answered. Both men perished because the consuming passion of their souls was to redeem Israel! What did it matter to Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Micah,

[3] Hosea 11:8.

whether they lived or whether they died, so long as through their life and death the people of God were assisted to pass from death unto life!

But the Prince of all vicarious sufferers is Jesus of Nazareth.

"He saved others, Himself He can not save!" [4]

These words were spoken in derision by the chief priests and senseless onlookers surging around the cross. But even though they were intended to express cutting irony, never has a truer saying passed the lips of mortal man.

Jesus hung from the cross for the simple reason that the overmastering passion of His mind and heart was to save. This passion drove Him out of the seclusion and safety of His mountain home into the world of strife and hatred. The text of His first sermon, preached in the synagogue of Nazareth at the beginning of His career sounded the key-note of His ministry.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to
the poor;

[4] Mark 15:31.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." [5]

The poor, the captives, the blind, the bruised,—these are to be the special objects of His care! Repeatedly we hear Him defending His practice of associating with publicans and sinners.

"They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick . . . for I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." [6]

And thus we see Him going up and down the highways and byways of Palestine crying out to all who have ears to hear:

"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" [7]

But how is Jesus going to save unless He speaks the truth? Men are saved through the truth.

[5] Luke 4:18-19.
[6] Luke 5:31.
[7] Matt. 11:28.

"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." [8]

Jesus must speak the truth about God. Who is God?

"God is like us," reply the blind leaders of the blind; a super-scribe, a Pharisee raised to the nth power. He is seated on a throne above the heavens, and mortal man can do nothing with Him except through priest and sacrifice. He thinks so much of the sacred law that He spends six hours out of every twenty-four meditating upon it. He keeps a sharp lookout to make sure that His people do not overlook any of the minute requirements of the Talmud. Such is God!

"Not so!" says Jesus. God is the infinite, heavenly Father, whose moral nature is expressed in perfect holiness and perfect love. Holy love can not fail to discharge its sacred obligations. Therefore God is in honor bound to meet the need of those whom He has created in His own image. The attitude of the father in the parable of the prodigal son, of the shepherd in the parable of the lost sheep, of the housewife in the

[8] John 8:32.

parable of the lost coin, reveals the heart of the Eternal as He looks down in compassion upon weak, erring, sinful humanity. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Therefore, even as an earthly parent gives bread to his hungry children, so God is ready to impart Himself and every perfect gift to whomsoever calls upon His Holy Name.[9]

How can Jesus save unless He speaks the truth about man? Who is man?

"Man is a worm!" reply the Scribes and Pharisees with mock humility.

"Not so!" says Jesus. Man is the child of God, made in the image of the Father, immeasurably exalted above every other creature through the gift of mind and conscience. He comes from God, and he is going to God. Even in the publicans and sinners, buried under the filth of sin, is the divine spark which may be blown into a flame of consuming righteousness when played upon by the Holy Spirit. The lost coin has not lost its value. The image and superscription of the King are stamped upon it. If found it can be restored to circulation. God's purpose

[9] Luke 11:12.

is to find that which is lost. Therefore His Spirit moves over the vast chaos of sin, reclaiming, refreshing, redeeming, restoring.

How can Jesus save unless He tells the truth about religion? What is religion?

"Religion," reply the Scribes and Pharisees, "consists in the faithful observance of the sacred law; it consists of feasts, fasts, sacrifices and pilgrimages; it finds its deepest satisfaction in ceremonial purity, in the keeping of the Sabbath, in the repetition of long prayers, preferably in public places, in the wearing of philacteries, and in exploring the mysteries of mint, and anise, and cummin."

"Not so!" says Jesus. Religion is the realization of the presence of God in the believer's soul, and the consistent effort to organize one's life in harmony with the divine Will.[10] Pure and undefiled religion is concerned not with tradition and precedent, but with principles. Truth, justice, mercy,—service, sacrifice, faith,—loyalty, hope, courage,—these are some of the foundation stones upon which rests the life that is hid with Christ in God.

[10] Matt. 7:21.

How is Jesus going to save unless He tells the truth concerning the fate of the soul?

"If a man die, shall he live again?"

"Yes," reply the Pharisees, "in the nether world,—that dark, shadowy place, where man forever mourns the earthly life left behind."

"Nothing of the sort," reply the Sadducees, poking fun at the very idea by inventing a hypothetical case in which the same woman marries seven brothers in succession as fast as the preceding one is dead and buried,—only to ask with a sneer, "And now in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be?"

"Yes," calmly and confidently asserts the Lord Jesus. "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead, but of the living!" [11] Abraham has quitted this life centuries ago, and yet God speaks of him as if he were living, for the simple reason that Abraham, and all who have passed out of the temporal order are living somewhere in the Father's house. If those who leave us are extinguished as a candle

[11] Mark 12:26-27.

by the wind, then God presides over a vast cemetery filled with the bones and broken hopes of countless generations. Which is unthinkable! Therefore, "in my Father's house are many mansions," enough to hold the vast throngs pouring out of time into eternity. If it were not so, the truth loving, the gentlemanly Jesus would have told us! [12]

God of the living, in whose eyes
Unveiled Thy whole creation lies,
All souls are thine: we must not say
That those are dead who pass away;
From this our world of flesh set free,
We know them living unto Thee.

Released from earthly toil and strife,
With Thee is hidden still their life;
Thine are their thoughts, their works, their powers,
All Thine, and yet most truly ours;
For well we know, where'er they be,
Our dead are living unto Thee.

Not spilt like water on the ground,
Not wrapped in dreamless sleep profound,

[12] John 14:2-3.

Not wandering in unknown despair
Beyond Thy voice, Thine arm, Thy care;
Not left to lie like fallen tree:
Not dead, but living unto Thee.

Thy word is true, Thy will is just;
To Thee we leave them, Lord, in trust;
And bless Thee for the love which gave
Thy Son to fill a human grave,
That none might fear that world to see,
Where all are living unto Thee.[13]

In this quiet manner the Prophet of Nazareth went about speaking the truth by which men were to pass, as through a door, into the presence of their Heavenly Father. And there could be but one ending to this glorious mission, for there is something in the truth which stirs the very Devil in the hearts of men.

As the regularly accredited religious teachers of Israel witnessed the marvelous power wielded by the Carpenter upon the common people; as they heard them remark with feeling: "He speaks with authority and not as the Scribes"; [14]

[13] J. Ellerton, 1871.
[14] Matt. 7:29.

as they saw His gospel slowly undermining their ancient institutions, (the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifice,—covered as they were with the moss of tradition, and the poison-ivy of superstition), institutions which they, in their blindness, conceived as perfect and final, they were filled with rage. Their religious fanaticism was kindled to white heat. In the name of the God of their fathers, and for His greater glory, the voice of this unauthorized itinerant preacher must be silenced in death!

"Then were gathered together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas; and they took counsel together that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him." [15]

There could be but one ending to the Master's mission. Jesus did not deceive Himself into supposing that He would escape the lot of the prophets who had preceded Him. Therefore it was not long after the opening of His public ministry before He began to tell His friends that if they would be His disciples they must take up

[15] Matt. 26:3-4.

their crosses daily and follow him.[16] For whosoever starts out to save his life inevitably loses it, and whosoever deliberately throws away his life in the interest of a glorious cause ends by finding it. And certainly, it will profit a man nothing if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul; and what can a man get out of the material order that can ever take the place of a life glowing with the power and love of God.[17] The harvest comes because the seed in the ground is reabsorbed in the bosom of mother nature. So, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and die it abideth alone.[18]

It was not long before Jesus found occasion to rebuke Peter for suggesting a policy of safety first.[19] The Son of Man sets His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem, knowing full well what awaits him there.[20] Jerusalem for Jesus stands for fearless proclamation of God's character and program, for strife, misrepresentation, insult, false accusation, arrest, mock trial, condemnation,

[16] Luke 9:23.
[17] Matt. 16:24-26.
[18] John 12:24.
[19] Mark 8:33.
[20] Luke 9:51.

torture, ridicule,—the cross on Calvary. But what does it matter to Him, the Chief among ten thousand!

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." [21]

* * * * * *

Never in the tragic history of this old world of ours were the ranks of the willing, eager, vicarious sufferers augmented by such vast numbers as during the years of the world war. Literally millions of men and women, from the highest to the lowest, took the stand that it did not matter what might happen to them,—they might be torpedoed on the high seas and drowned like rats, they might be blown to bits by high explosives, they might be mutilated, or blinded, they might rot in the trenches and dug-outs of Flanders, they might perish from heat, or cold, or hunger, or thirst,—it did not matter what happened to them, so long as the spiritual heritage, and priceless rights of mankind were, through their sacrifices, preserved and vindicated for all time.

On a gloomy afternoon in January, 1918, the

[21] John 12:32.

very day after Paris had passed through a murderous aeroplane raid in which scores of innocent folk had been killed or maimed, the writer happened to stroll into the vestibule of the Sorbonne. The walls of that great hall are covered with thousands of cards, each card four inches square, each card recording the deeds of some professor, or instructor, or graduate, or student of that great college who has perished on the battlefields of Europe that France may live.

"They saved others, themselves they could not save."

It is said that Oxford alone has lost during the world war, twenty thousand men who at some time or other have been identified with the colleges of that centre of learning. And much the same proportion holds good for all other British universities.

"They saved others, themselves they could not save."

During the terrific fighting of 1916 around Verdun a French officer spied an old woman wandering aimlessly in No Man's Land. A corporal's

guard was sent out to arrest her. The petty officer demanded to know why she was breaking the stringent regulation against civilians venturing into the fighting zone. The old woman explained that at the beginning of the war she had seven sons, that six of them had fallen in battle at various times, and that she had just received word that her seventh and youngest had been killed at Verdun. She had come in the vain hope of locating his grave.

Instantly the corporal commanded his men to present arms. And the peasant woman, waving her right hand over her head, cried out:

"Vive la France!"

Now we understand why it is that the best suffer most. It is because they are more alive to the issues of life, because they are more responsive to the summons of duty, and to the appeal of honor. With them, Noblesse Oblige. They are spiritually akin to the disciples of old, who having been cast into dark dungeons, beaten with many rods, and threatened with dire consequences should they ever dare to proclaim again the name of Jesus, went home "rejoicing that they

had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for that Name.[22]

Why do the good suffer?

In order that their honesty, sincerity, disinterestedness may be established beyond question; they suffer that they may pass from goodness to perfection; they suffer that the moral law may be exalted; they suffer since man is moving from ignorance and foolishness into knowledge and wisdom, paying as he goes; they suffer because life is vicarious both negatively and positively. For all these reasons good men suffer.

[22] Acts 5:41.

IV

But does this analysis exhaust the subject? Is the question answered in full? Do not things happen for which there is no explanation? Does not the time come when he who, like Job's comforters, attempts to explain why calamity after calamity overtakes the innocent, runs the risk of insulting the intelligence and outraging the conscience of him who sits on the ash heap of his hopes?

Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamite came to comfort Job in his unutterable grief. And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they raised their voices in lamentation, and wept. "And they rent every one his robe, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him; for they saw that his grief was very great." [1]

[1] Job 3:12-13.

So long as these three men remained silent their consolations were effective. What a pity that they ever opened their mouths to speak!

Things happen which seem to proclaim that the universe is ruled by malignant spirits.

In the city of Florence, hard by the Santa Trinita bridge, resting on a massive base, rises a great granite column, surmounted by an heroic and gilded statue of Justice, holding a sword in its right hand, and a pair of scales in its left. The statue is nearly fifty feet from the pavement.

About the middle of the last century a proud and wealthy lady lived in an apartment nearly opposite this monument. She was the envied possessor of a priceless collection of jewels, and her dearest ornament was a string of faultless pearls.

One morning the great lady was sitting by her dressing table, and her maid was by her side assisting her to dress. The glittering jewels were scattered on the table, which stood by an open window through which poured a flood of sunshine. Her toilet completed, the lady went out for her morning ride, leaving her maid, whom she implicitly trusted, to lock up the precious gems.

That evening the proud matron called for her string of pearls. She was going to a great social function, and she proposed to shine among her peers. But the necklace was missing. Every nook and corner of the apartment was searched in vain. The stones were nowhere to be found.

Of course the police was called in. Of course the maid-in-waiting was accused of the theft. No other human being had been there from the time the lady had gone for her morning ride until her return, and the pearls were lying on the dressing table when she left the room. Who else could have taken them? Circumstantial evidence made all this quite clear.

Of course the maid passionately protested her innocence, and of course she was arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced to a term of years at hard labor; and, when finally released, thrown out on the street to eke out a miserable existence, despised and disgraced.

Years came and went. Florence continued to live its usual life of joy and sorrow, happiness and misery. At last the municipality decided that it was time to regild the heroic statue of Justice towering above the ancient city by the Arno. The

scaffolding was erected, the workmen climbed to its summit, and began to remove the dust and filth of a hundred years.

And what did they find? In one of the deep plates of the scales held aloft by the symbol of Justice, were the remains of a large bird's nest, and hidden among the débris rested the stolen string of pearls. But the innocent and falsely accused servant was dead of want and a broken heart, and it was beyond the power of accuser, police, judge, jury, and prosecuting attorney to atone for their frightful blunder. How could they know that certain birds are fascinated by the glitter of jewels? and how could they guess that one such bird had made off with the missing string of pearls to use as a foundation for its nest?

However, the heroic statue of Justice, with its sword and its scales, was regilded, so that it might impressively continue to proclaim the legend that law and fair play rule among men. But what would have been the thoughts of that statue, should it have been miraculously endowed with intelligence and conscience, as it kept on looking down upon the great city with its throb-

bing and tragic life! Is it not true that in the name of justice, religion, morals, and every other virtue known and practiced in Heaven, some great wrongs have been, and still are daily, committed down here upon earth?

Things happen for which no explanation is possible. The time comes in the lives of some good men when they are face to face with the infinite mystery of life.

Jesus reached that point. As He looked down from the cross on the sneering Pharisees, and heard the insulting jeers of the demented crowd whom He had lived to serve and bless, the dark impenetrable clouds of doubt closed down upon His mind, and, out of the darkness He cried out unto heaven, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" [2]

That cry is a solemn and heart-breaking indictment of the providential order. What can be said in favor of a universe which allows Jesus of Nazareth to be crucified between two thieves!

What shall we do when we are face to face with the infinite mystery of life?

Exactly what Jesus did. All His life, from the

[2] Mark 14:34.

days of His boyhood as He "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and with man," [3] in the days of His youth, when He laboured in the village carpenter's shop, remaining obedient and subject to His earthly parents;[4] all through the years of His manhood, whether tempted in the wilderness or confronted by men's needs, He walked by faith. [5] Hence it is not surprising that the moment of despair on Golgotha soon was over. The habit of a lifetime reasserted itself even during the agony and shame of the cross. With His last breath we hear Him murmur:

"Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit." [6]

* * * * * *

The book of Job closes with a mighty appeal to walk by faith. When the heated, and imperfect arguments of the disputants are ended, and the baffling question, Why do the good suffer? is

[3] Luke 2:52.
[4] Luke 2:51.
[5] Matt. 4:4.
[6] Luke 23:46.

only partially answered, the anonymous author of the sacred drama ushers Jehovah upon the stage to speak for Himself.

But does the Eternal argue? On the contrary, He causeth the universe, as it were, to pass in review before this broken man whose soul is so full of protest and despair. The treasures of the hills and fields, of the rivers and the sea; the marvelous creatures which roam above and beneath the earth; the wonders of the heavens,—sun, moon, and stars,—the Pleiades, Orion, and the Milky Way,—all these move majestically before Job, proclaiming that everlasting goodness and perfect harmony reign supreme at the heart of the Eternal. [7]

It is at this point that the climax of the book of Job is reached. The disfigured and distracted leper is suddenly overwhelmed by the realization that his life is still in the Divine keeping. Lifting his hands to the calm and serene heavens above him, he utters the triumphant cry of faith:

"I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;
But now mine eye seeth thee." [8]

[7] Job 34:41.
[8] Job 42:5.

And so with us. When the black clouds of grief close down upon us and we are face to face with the infinite mystery of life, and our well-meaning friends distract us by their vain chatter, we will walk by faith in the Eternal Goodness.

Never shall we surrender our reason. We will follow it as far as it can lead us, and as long as it lasts. But when reason fails,—standing on its uttermost edge, we shall take the long leap in the dark, we shall stretch,

"lame hands of faith,"

and grope for the hem of God's garment, we shall ask the ancient question which admits of a single answer:

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" [9]

[9] Gen. 18:25.

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